

4. Why Paul was so bold

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, friends. We come to our Bible reading now. We're continuing with our studies in 2 Corinthians, and we'll come to that in just a moment, but I want to read first a short passage from Exodus chapter 34, and you'll see as we go along this evening what bearing this has upon the passage from 2 Corinthians that I'll be reading. So let's turn first to Exodus 34. You'll find this on page 75 in our church Bibles, and I'm going to read the final section there, beginning at verse 29 and going through to verse 35.

So Exodus 34, verse 29, and this is about the shining face of Moses and the veil that he put over his face to prevent the Israelites being blinded or dazzled by him.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them.

Afterward, all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, but the skin of Moses' face was shining, and Moses would put the veil over his face again until he went in to speak with him.

Well, let's turn now to 2 Corinthians chapter 3. And you'll find this on page 965. The passage that we're really studying tonight begins at verse 6 or verse 7, but I'll read the whole of the chapter so that we can get the context a little bit clearer in our minds. So 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 1.

[2 : 42] Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.

Not that we're sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Now, if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory.

Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. Since we have such a hope, we are very bold. Not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.

But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

[5 : 03] Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Amen. This is the word of God, and may his blessing be upon it for us this evening. Amen. Let's bow our heads for a moment of prayer, in which we ask the Lord to help us to hear his word, and to understand it and receive it. Lord God, as we open the pages of the wonderful Bible once again, with its inexhaustible treasures, as it teaches us about you and your ways and your purpose, and about the Lord Jesus. So we pray that you will open our hearts and minds, give us understanding, and hearts and minds that are ready to listen and to obey what we hear. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, let's be turning up our 2 Corinthians again, page 965. Now, as we begin our study this evening, and as I said earlier, it's really verse 7 to verse 18, more or less, that we're looking at tonight here in chapter 3. As we start off, I want us to be a little bit like a pack of hounds who are trying to pick up a particular trail of scent.

Really, a Bible reader is a little bit like a hound. We open our passage, and we try to follow the trail that our author has taken before us. In a sense, whether we're reading Paul or Moses or Isaiah, we're trying to think after him the thoughts of the author. So we're trying to think Paul's thoughts after him and detect his line of thought, and that's why we need a keen nose.

So let's, as it were, snuff the air, and let's see if we can catch the scent by looking first at verse 12. Since we have such a hope, we are very bold.

[7 : 45] Now, that's a bit of a surprise, I think, to see Paul claiming to be bold. In fact, the Greek word that he uses there really means bold in speech, boldly outspoken.

And I say that's a slight surprise because later in the letter, Paul is going to say quite a lot about his weaknesses. In fact, the weakness of Paul is one of the big themes of 2 Corinthians. He has begun to talk about his weaknesses already in the letter, about his sufferings and his afflictions in chapter 1, about his downcast spirit in chapter 2, verse 13, his spirit not being at rest, and then chapter 3, verse 5 that we looked at last week about his insufficiency.

He says not that we're sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from ourselves. So he comes across as the very opposite of a man with bulging biceps.

And yet he says in chapter 3, verse 12, we are very bold. And it's a thread that seems to run on through the next couple of chapters as well. Look at chapter 4, verse 1.

We do not lose heart. And then chapter 4, verse 16. He says it again. So we do not lose heart. Chapter 5, verse 6.

[9 : 02] So we are always of good courage. So as we try and catch the scent, I think we begin to see two things. On the one hand, there is weakness and difficulty.

And Paul felt his sense of weakness greatly. But on the other hand, there is boldness and courage. And I want to ask this question tonight. How is it that Paul can be so bold when he is clearly struggling with great difficulties and with a sense of great personal weakness?

Now let's remind ourselves of the situation at Corinth. The Corinthians were in the middle 50s AD. 56 AD probably is the date of this letter. Now the Corinthians at this stage, when their church was about six years old, were in great danger of having their understanding of the real gospel corrupted by false teachers who seemed to have been infiltrating the church from outside while Paul was not there.

In fact, Paul was hundreds of miles away, probably in Macedonia, perhaps in Philippi when he was writing this letter. But news reaches him on the Bush Telegraph about what's happening at Corinth and about how these infiltrators are coming in.

He calls them false apostles later in the letter and even servants of Satan. And Paul's main reason for writing this letter is to appeal to the Corinthian Christians not to desert the true gospel and to come back to him.

[10 : 29] As I put it last week, he's rather like a mother bird who's trying to regather her straying babies under her wings. They threaten to fall out of the nest. And that's the danger they're in.

It's not so much that he wants them to have their allegiance to him for his sake, but rather for the sake of the true gospel. So why is Paul able to be so bold as he puts it here in chapter 3, verse 12? Well, we'll come to the long answer to that in just a moment. But the short answer is that he's utterly convinced that the gospel of Jesus Christ, the true gospel, brings people truly to God in a way that the old Judaism was powerless to do.

Now, as you run your eye down chapter 3, it's obvious that Paul is contrasting the religion of Moses or some aspect of the religion of Moses with the gospel of Christ.

And he's saying in verses 5 and 6 that although he has no sufficiency or competence or power within himself, he and his gospel co-workers do have a sufficiency for their task, which comes from God.

[11 : 38] And in verse 6, he tells us what this competence is. He says, God has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit.

For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now, what is this letter that kills? Well, what he means by that is the Ten Commandments.

As verse 7 puts it, it's the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone. That's the tablets, the stone tablets that Moses brought down from the mountain. And you'll see back in verse 3, Paul refers to tablets of stone.

And that's the very thing that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, on which God had written the Ten Commandments with his own finger. So why should Paul feel it was necessary to contrast the religion of the Ten Commandments with the gospel, which he calls the ministry of the new covenant, in verse 6?

Well, the answer must be that these false apostles, these false teachers, although they were claiming allegiance to Christ, they were claiming to be Christians, but they were actually insisting that the Corinthian Christians should submit to various Jewish regulations.

[12 : 52] Paul doesn't tell us here exactly which regulations, though it could well have been circumcision or the Old Testament laws that distinguish kosher foods from non-kosher foods. But at the heart of the problem, there was clearly an insistence that the Corinthians should fall in line with certain aspects of Old Testament Judaism.

Now, let's just give a little bit of historical context to this problem, which is sometimes called the problem of Judaizing influences. When Paul wrote this letter, probably in the year 56, just think of it, the Christian church was barely 25 years old.

It was very young. Now, we live in such a different atmosphere here today in this country, where the gospel began to take root some 1,700 or 1,800 years ago.

Now, I know we're very much under attack and under pressure in this country at the moment, but at least we have a long Christian history. And questions about Jewish regulations, things like circumcision and kosher foods and that kind of thing, are simply not living questions for people like us today in this country.

But when the Church of Christ was only 25 years old, these were very much live issues. People would look at these young, vigorous churches that were springing up all over the Mediterranean world, and they would say, what kind of an animal is this Christian church?

[14 : 18] How are we to understand it? It's clearly connected with Judaism, the Judaism that we've known for centuries, but it's hard to understand how it's connected. Many of its members, its new members, seem to be Gentiles, but its leadership is largely Jewish.

And Jesus, whom they call the Christ, was clearly a Jew. So, is Christianity a development of Judaism? Is it perhaps a heretical form of Judaism?

In what relationship does it stand to the religion of the Old Testament? And those were the kind of questions being asked and debated. And for Paul, they were undoubtedly the most difficult questions that he had to face during his years as a missionary leader and apostle.

And for Paul, to teach the truth about the relationship between Christianity and Judaism was perhaps his biggest challenge. And here in 2 Corinthians, chapter 3, we have a small slice of that teaching.

So, before we get into the passage itself, let me say briefly what Paul's teaching is on the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Just two points. First, Judaism is powerless to bring eternal salvation to Jews.

[15 : 34] The Jew must turn to Christ for salvation as Paul, the Jew, himself did. But, despite the powerlessness of Judaism to bring salvation, secondly, the Judaism of the Old Testament prepares the world and the Jewish people for the coming of Christ, the Savior King.

The Old Testament is all about Jesus. He fulfills its great prophecies and promises. He's the one who reverses the curse laid upon the human race in Genesis, chapter 3.

He is the one who saves his people by defeating Satan, by robbing Satan of his prey. He is the one through whom human beings, he's the only one through whom human beings can find forgiveness and reconciliation with God, adoption into the family of God, and eternal acceptance.

Christ is the key to every blessing. He and he alone has the power to rescue men and women and to bring us to eternal bliss in the presence of God. So, in the confused world of the middle part of the first century AD, Paul has to tackle people whose thinking is not sorted out on these questions. And where he comes across people like these false apostles at Corinth who seem to be trying to burden new Christians with various Jewish regulations, Paul says, no.

[17:00] Those who come to Christ do not have to enter through a gateway called Judaism. And those who continue to grow in Christ do not have to submit to Jewish regulations and the rigmarole of Jewish cultural distinctives like circumcision and kosher foods.

So, in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, Paul is helping the Corinthian Christians to understand all this. And if they can get his teaching into their heads and their hearts, they'll be able to resist the false apostles and escape their clutches.

Now, if we ask, but what relevance does all this have for people like us today? Because after all, we are not threatened by Judaizing influences in Glasgow, are we?

The answer is, it is highly relevant for us today because, in 2 Corinthians, Paul teaches us the truthfulness and power and power of the true gospel.

So, although today we're having to fight against different forms of false teaching, we need to know, just as the Corinthians did, why the gospel is uniquely true and how it is that the gospel truly brings us to the Lord.

[18:11] And as we look at our passage this evening, I want us to see two things. I've got two main headings. First, that the true gospel is about life, not death. And secondly, the true gospel enables us to see the Lord.

First then, the true gospel, Paul says, is about life and not death. Look at that startling phrase at the end of verse 6. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Now, by the letter, as I said before, Paul means the letters of the Ten Commandments written on the stone tablets that Paul received from God and brought to the Israelites. And by the Spirit, Paul means the Holy Spirit, who in the words of verse 3 writes his life-giving message not on tablets of stone, but on the tablets of human hearts somewhere deep within our hearts and lives.

So let's look at verses 7 to 11 where Paul is contrasting two ministries. The first he calls the ministry of death in verse 7 and the second he calls in verse 8 the ministry of the Spirit.

Now, in each case, the word ministry here means a powerful influence that has a decisive outcome. So the ministry of death is an influence that brings people down and destroys them, whereas the ministry of the Spirit brings people to life.

[19:43] So these two ministries have categorically opposite effects. To put this in shorthand, the ministry of death is Judaism, whereas the ministry of the Spirit is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's what Paul means here. Now, before we go any further, let's notice how extraordinary that phrase in verse 7 is. The ministry of death.

That is Paul's description of the Ten Commandments. Jewish Paul. Just think of Moses himself. Try and picture this. Moses coming down from Mount Sinai from his unforgettable meeting with the Lord on the top of the mountain.

And as he comes down the mountain, in each of his hands he bears a great stone tablet covered with the words of the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God as Exodus tells us.

And just imagine his brother Aaron seeing him coming down, runs forward to meet him at the foot of the mountain and he says to him, Brother Moses, what is that that you carry in your arms?

[20:46] And Moses replied, I carry the ministry of death. It's extraordinary, isn't it, to think of it like that, that Paul should use this phrase of the Ten Commandments. Weren't these Ten Commandments given to the Israelites to show them how to live?

And haven't Christian people held to them and taught them for 20 centuries because we believe that they show us how to live? What does Paul mean when he calls them the ministry of death? What he means is that although the Ten Commandments teach us the perfect standard of human behavior, in the end, they will bring us to condemnation and death because we can never live up to them.

The first four of them teach us to love the Lord God with all our hearts and the remaining six teach us to love our neighbor as ourself. But we are as capable of keeping them as we are of running a mile in a minute.

The standard they set is way beyond anything that any human being can live up to. Now, of course, there are no statistics for this, but my guess is that most human beings break the Ten Commandments thousands of times every year and tens of thousands of times, if not hundreds of thousands, in a lifetime.

[22 : 06] we recognize their beauty and their truthfulness. We recognize that if society lived by them, Glasgow and Edinburgh and London and the whole country would be a perfect paradise.

The Old Testament teaches that he who does them, he who keeps them, will live. But the problem is that no one does them and no one keeps them and therefore no one can live in God's sight through keeping them.

Paul puts the problem like this in Romans chapter 7 verse 10. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. Now, Paul loved the commandments, but he recognized that they pronounced the death sentence on him because he couldn't keep them.

So for Paul, the lovely, holy, good, righteous commandments proved in the end to bring not God's smile, not God's acceptance, but God's frown, God's wrath, and God's condemnation.

Now, let's see how Paul explains all this in verses 7 to 11. This ministry of death, he says in verse 7, came with glory, brightness, dazzling brightness, such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory.

[23 : 26] Now, the original account of this in Exodus, which I read earlier, speaks of the skin of Moses' face shining, both when he came down Mount Sinai with the tablets, but also on subsequent occasions when he went to speak with God face to face in the tent of meeting.

Moses' face reflected the shining glory of the Lord because he met with him face to face, and the reflection of the brightness of the Lord was so dazzling that the Israelites couldn't look at Moses. I suppose it was rather like those moments when inadvertently you look up into the sun. You never mean to, do you? But you do occasionally and you have to turn away because it's too dazzling.

Now, Paul is saying if this ministry that brings death, the ministry of Moses and the Ten Commandments, if this death-dealing ministry was attended with such heavenly glory, doesn't it stand to reason that the ministry of the life-giving spirit will be attended by even more glory?

And you'll see in verse 9, Paul introduces a new term, the ministry of righteousness. Now, that's the same thing as the ministry of the spirit, but Paul brings in this new word righteousness to make the point that the gospel, when someone believes it, places that person in the position of being counted and accepted by God as righteous.

Acquitted, cleansed, forgiven, no longer under God's wrath, no longer destined for eternal death, but destined now for eternal life. And Paul emphasizes his point further in verse 10.

[25 : 07] Indeed, he says, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all because of the glory that surpasses it. Paul is saying that although the glory that attended the coming of the Ten Commandments was so great and so dazzling, it was actually a paltry, small glory compared to the new glory of the ministry of righteousness, which is hardly surprising when you remember that the one led to death and the other brings the promise of life.

Just look at verse 10 with me again. I think it makes you think of what happens in a city as the dawn breaks. Just think of the city of Glasgow. Throughout the night, the city has been brightly lit up by big street lamps and plasma screens and cars and buses and lots of other sources of light.

But when the dawn breaks and the sun comes up in its strength, those street lights and all the other lights become irrelevant. They're useless. Their moment has gone.

The new glory is far greater than the old and makes the old irrelevant. Now, verse 11. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory.

And here Paul begins to bring in a new idea which helps us to see more clearly what he's talking about. He is saying that this death-dealing power of the Ten Commandments has now been brought to an end.

[26 : 38] It's being replaced with something new. And the something new is something permanent. And let me just try and tie in the loose ends and sum up what Paul is saying here in verses 7 to 11.

He's contrasting these two ministries. One he calls the ministry of death in verse 7 and the other he calls the ministry sorry, ministry of death in verse 7 and the ministry of condemnation in verse 9.

It's the same thing. That's the letter that kills. But the other ministry, how does he describe it? He speaks of it as the ministry of the Spirit in verse 8 and the ministry of righteousness in verse 9.

And those who, like Paul, exercise this ministry of the Spirit are called, look back to verse 6, the ministers of a new covenant.

So you can see the contrast. Old covenant in the end brings death and condemnation. New covenant brings Spirit, the Holy Spirit, life, and righteousness.

[27 : 44] And from verse 11, the ministry of death is now brought to an end, but the ministry of the new covenant is permanent. So Paul is asking his readers, both his original readers and us today, he's asking his readers to think on a big historical scale here.

He's asking us to think of two great eras. We call them B.C. and A.D. That's much easier for us today because we're at the latter end of more than 2,000 years of the new covenant era.

For Paul's first readers, the new covenant era was only 25 years old. But this is still what Paul is saying to the Corinthians in 56 A.D. Brothers, we are in a new era.

The death-dealing power of the Ten Commandments has now given way to the life-giving gospel of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. And this is why, you dear batty Corinthians, you must not give way to false teachers who are telling you to go back to some form of Judaism.

Now, friends, this is all highly important for us. I know that you and I and our friends and our contemporaries and family members are not going to be tempted to go to the synagogue normally.

[29 : 00] We're not interested in issues like circumcision and kosher foods and whether we should wear pigtailed and uncut beards. But the question of the Ten Commandments is of vital importance to us today and for this reason.

All people, by nature, think, deep inside themselves, that the way to gain acceptance with God is by obeying God's commandments. If you go out into Socky Hall Street on a Saturday morning when it's busy and you stop one or two people and you ask Mr. Joe Average how he can be in the right with God, he will say something like this if he's not an atheist.

He'll say, if I live a decent life, if I do what is right, I'll be okay with God and I'll be accepted in the end. But he won't be accepted because he can't live that way.

We're powerless to keep the commandments of God. Good and lovely and shining as they are, in the end they will bring us down and condemn us.

we need a more merciful ministry than the ministry of death. And God has given it to us. Paul preaches the ministry of Jesus. Paul tells us that Jesus has taken in our place the condemnation to death that we deserved.

[30 : 21] Jesus has stood in for us as our representative and he has paid our debt. and once we trust him and belong to him the accusing finger of the ten commandments can no longer be pointed at us.

He is our savior and he has brought us in Paul's words here life and the spirit and the new covenant and righteousness so that all who belong to Jesus are now counted as righteous in the sight of God no longer unacceptable and filthy but cleansed and born again.

And let me tell you what the new covenant brings to those who belong to Christ. There are three distinctive things about the new covenant. You'll find this all clearly laid out no need to turn to it now but you'll find it in Jeremiah chapter 31 and the passage in Jeremiah is quoted in full in Hebrews chapter 8 in the New Testament as well.

So three things three distinctive things that the new covenant brings. First the new covenant brings the law of God into the hearts and minds of believers so that we begin from the heart to love what God loves and to value what God values.

Our hearts are changed. The law of God is written upon them. So that's the first thing the law on the heart. Secondly the new covenant enables us to know the Lord.

[31 : 46] They shall all know me from the greatest to the least of them. Those are the words God speaks in Jeremiah. And thirdly the new covenant brings something which the old could never bring and that is a real deep full lasting permanent forgiveness.

God says I will remember their sins no more. So a new heart a new knowledge of God and complete forgiveness.

forgiveness. And we know that that forgiveness is complete because Jesus shed his blood in death on the cross as the Passover lamb whose sacrifice for sin is effective forever and never has to be repeated.

The new covenant is the real thing. In Paul's words here in verse 11 it is permanent. And that's why he says in verse 12 since we have such a hope we are very bold.

we're able to be because the message we proclaim brings real life and eternal life and all that your false apostles can bring you in the end is a ministry of death.

[32 : 57] Does this mean then that the Ten Commandments no longer have anything to do with us today? Well not at all. But it means that we no longer stand in the same relationship to them as we did before Christ came.

They are now no longer like the executioner's axe poised to deal the death blow. For Christians they now open up before us the lovely path or pathway of our new life.

They teach us how to live and we seek to follow them from a position of being forgiven. But you see Christ has stood between them and us as far as the old threat was concerned.

The axe has fallen on his neck so that it should no longer fall on ours. The Ten Commandments used to say to us we shall bring you down to condemnation.

Now they say Christ has taken the condemnation and we invite you now to walk with us and to live with us and to have us written on your very hearts. So there's the first thing.

[34 : 02] Paul is able to be very bold in his teaching because the true gospel he preaches brings life not death. The ministry of death has given way now to the ministry of righteousness.

Well now secondly from verses 12 to 18 the true gospel enables us to see the Lord. There it is in verse 18 and we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image etc.

Now you'll see that the dominant idea in this final section of chapter 3 from 12 to 18 is to do with a veil a veil that hangs over somebody's face and eyes and prevents them from seeing something clearly either prevents them from seeing or from being seen.

Brides on their wedding day sometimes wear a veil just to keep the bridegroom guessing until they're actually pronounced man and wife. Even you'll know this from going to wedding receptions even some lady guests at wedding receptions sometimes wear little veils don't they just down to the bottom of their noses or maybe a tiny bit lower.

I think it's called fashion. But that's a department of life of which I'm innocent. Now here in verse 13 Paul refers to this veil that Moses used to wear so as to prevent the Israelites from being dazzled by the brightness of his face.

[35 : 36] But Paul gives another reason for the veil in verse 13 and that was so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end.

That means they were prevented from seeing that the law brought to them by Moses would reach its terminus its end and then be replaced by the life-giving truth of the gospel.

They couldn't see it then Paul is saying and he goes on to say and they can't see it now either.

Why? Because verse 14 their minds were hardened and to this day he goes on when they read the old covenant that same veil remains unlifted.

Now you will know that to Paul the apostle it was a matter of profound grief and sadness that so many of his Jewish contemporaries would not come to Christ. Yes he was appointed the apostle to the Gentiles he had a specific ministry to them but he loved the Jews and he often preached to them and sought to persuade them that Jesus really was their Messiah and the son of David.

You'll feel his grief as you read Romans 9 and 10 and 11 particularly. There were some Jews who responded to the gospel and came to Christ but so many didn't and Paul explains their refusal in terms of this veil in this passage.

[36 : 59] Look at verse 15. Yes to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts not only over their eyes but over their hearts. So they read Moses they read the old covenant but they cannot see that it points them to Christ and finds its fulfillment in Christ.

They can't see that Christ brings to a terminus to an end the ministry of death and gloriously replaces it with the ministry that brings life. Many years ago I became friendly with a Jewish rabbi in the Manchester area.

The reason for this was that his wife was a young lady doctor and my wife at the time was a young lady doctor and the two young lady doctors found themselves working together on the same ward in one of the Manchester hospitals and they became friendly.

Anyway we had an invitation from the rabbi and his wife to go round to their house for a meal. They were very hospitable to us. And after we'd eaten together the rabbi took me upstairs.

He said come up to my study. I want to show you something. And as he took me up into his study there on a big reading desk was a beautiful big heavy leather bound copy of the Old Testament

written in Hebrew.

[38 : 10] It was clearly his pride and joy. And I think it was open on a passage from the prophet Isaiah. And he said to me, Edward, look at this lovely book.

Here is the law of God. God. And at that very moment I realized with a great sense of pain that I understood it in a way that he didn't. Not because I was a minister, but simply because I was a Christian.

Now, Paul knew the Jews and Paul knew the gospel. And he is saying here that the Jews read the Old Covenant but don't understand that it points them to Christ and finds its fulfillment in Christ. But, Paul also knew, verse 16, that when one, one Jew, turns to the Lord, the Lord Jesus, the veil is then removed.

And in verse 17, Paul says that when this Jew turns to the Lord Jesus, he receives the Spirit and new birth and forgiveness. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, where the Holy Spirit enters a person's life and brings about the new birth, there is at last freedom.

[39 : 25] Freedom from the power of death. Freedom from the downward drag of the law and its accusing finger. Freedom from the ministry of death and condemnation. Now, Paul had often seen this in his preaching to Jews.

Yes, many Jews remained with hardened hearts, but not all did. There were some who turned to the Lord Jesus, and when that happened, Paul could see the veil being wonderfully removed from their eyes and their hearts.

And what does the removal of this veil then lead to? It means that people begin to see not the fading glory of Moses' face, but the glory of the Lord Jesus.

As verse 18 puts it, and we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, the image of Christ, from one degree of glory to another.

Now, that verse is a description of the Christian life. Once we're Christians, we begin to gaze at the glory of the Lord Jesus.

[40 : 34] Now, I don't mean that we see him physically. We don't see his physical form with our physical eyes. Paul doesn't mean that. But we do begin to see him in the sense that we get to know him in the pages of scripture.

And as we gaze year after year into the Bible, we begin to see more and more of the truth about him. His true form and features and character take shape before our eyes.

We come gradually to love him more and more and to look forward in the end to seeing him face to face. And do you see the remarkable thing that Paul says in the middle of verse 18?

As we behold his glory, we are being transformed into the same image, from one degree of glory to another. We gaze at him and we become more and more like him.

Now, friends, let me ask, do you want that, to become more and more like him? You'd be mad not to. This is a great theme in Paul.

[41 : 39] We had it this morning, how Joseph and Judah too were being made more like the Lord as they got to know him better. It's a great theme in Paul that Christ's people are fashioned to show the features of their master more and more, until finally in the new creation we shall be like him completely.

That's when the transformation will be brought to its completion. Now, all of this explains why the apostle Paul is able to be so bold.

He wouldn't be bold, he couldn't be bold, if his message was weak and piffling. But he's able to have utter confidence in a message as great as this. This is why he's able to challenge and face down the false teachers at Corinth.

All they can give the Corinthians at the end of the day is a ministry of death and a veiled and hardened heart as they try to lead the Corinthians back to some kind of Judaism.

But Paul has a gospel of life and righteousness and the Holy Spirit, a gospel that brings freedom from condemnation, a gospel that transforms all who believe it increasingly into the very image of Christ himself.

[42 : 52] love. Now if Paul can be bold with such a message as that, so can you and I.

Like Paul, we will sometimes feel intimidated by false gospels. There are plenty of them around. We'll often feel intimidated by the atmosphere of godlessness and atheism in which we live in this country.

people will press us and pressurize us to turn away from our gospel and our Lord Jesus and the lifestyle of the gospel as well. But although we are weak and insufficient in ourselves, incompetent in ourselves like Paul, we can still be bold.

Look on to chapter 4 verse 1. It is because we have this ministry, this new ministry of righteousness by the mercy of God that we do not lose hope.

heart. This message of the gospel is the real thing. In the words of chapter 3 verse 12, it is such a hope. And since we have such a glorious hope, we too can be very bold.

[44 : 09] Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Dear God, our Father, we think again of your servant, the apostle Paul. who sets himself out to be our example of how to live the Christian life as well as our teacher of doctrine.

We think of him in his weakness, sometimes with knees knocking, preaching the gospel in fear and trembling. And yet we're conscious of this great, deep, wonderful boldness as well because he knows that the gospel really is the truth and that only through the gospel can the ministry of death be taken away and new life and righteousness and the Holy Spirit brought to human beings.

So we pray, dear Father, that you will give us the same kind of holy boldness that Paul had, that though we may be very weak at one level, we might speak your words truly and boldly and be unafraid.

So please bless us and be with us in the days ahead. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.